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PSYCHO- SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF TRUANT BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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Abstract

This study investigated the combined and separate contributions of child, family, school, society, and government factors to truant behaviour of secondary school students in Oyo State. Five hundred and forty students were selected from the three senatorial districts of Oyo State through multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques. Four validated instruments were used to gather data from the subjects. Multiple regression analysis and t-test statistic were used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that all the independent variables taken together correlated significantly with the dependent variable. The results also revealed that the five independent variables jointly accounted for 66.0% of the observed variance in truant behaviour. The results also indicated that each of the five independent variables contributed to the prediction of the dependent variable. Government variable made the highest contribution to the prediction of truant behaviour followed by school; child; society and family factors in that order of potency level. Based on these findings, the study recommended that counselling and educational psychologists give adequate consideration to these five aetiological factors in their attempts to develop workable intervention strategies that would combat truant behaviour of students.

Background to the study

The National Policy on Education (1998) states that the quality of instruction given to all Nigerian citizens at all levels of education be oriented towards the inculcation of certain values. These include respect for the worth and dignity of the individual; faith in man's ability to make rational decision; moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal and human relations; shared responsibility for the common good of society; promotion of the physical emotional and psychological development of all children; and the acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance. Regular attendance of

students in schools is highly required if these laudable values are to be truly inculcated into the learners. Regular attendance in school is not only an important factor in school success (Rothman, 2001), but also the first condition for school success (Garbarino and Asp, 1981). Non- school attendance behaviour, which is interchangeably used with truancy or absenteeism, occurs when students fail to attend school when they ought to. Despite the fact rules and regulations that compulsory laws are made in some countries to ensure the presence of students in the schools, cases of non-attendance are still prevalent. Kaeser (1985) pointed out that cases of illegal absence exist in almost every school.

The staggering high rate of students' absence in school is made more poignant from diverse reports. Wisconsin (2000), for instance, reported that approximately 15, 600 or 1.6 percent of students missed school on any given day in Wisconsin public schools. In the New York city's public schools Garry (2001) reported that about 150,000 of 1 million students skipped school on a typical day in the nation's largest school, while an average of 62,000 or 10% of those enrolled in the nation's second largest public school are out of the school each day. Although accurate reports on the number of students who skip school on a typical day in Nigeria is presently unavailable Nwana (1975), Alhassan (1990), Bolarin (1996), Ugbede (1999), and others have repeatedly identified truancy as an act of indiscipline commonly found in Nigeria schools.

The effects of truancy have been documented in diverse reports and 'studies. These include unemployment, frequent job changes, and less job satisfaction (Folgelman and Manor, 1990), lower academic achievement (Baker and Jansen, 2000), and delinquent and criminal activities (Garry, 2001). From the foregoing therefore, the increasing rate of students' unlawful absences in the schools and its inherent grave dangers to national development make it imperative for studies that would expose the aetiological factors underlying its occurrence. There are a number of theoretical postulations on the possible aetiology of student's absence from school. Stoll (1993) and Eric Clearing House on Urban Education (1997) submitted that the reasons for pupils' truancy are many and varied. As pointed out by Lansdown (1990) there is no point in seeking single factor explanation for a phenomenon as complex as non-attendance at school. He concluded that lack of considerable interaction among several variables would not allow one approach to explain all problems.

Thus, several attempts have been made to classify the

aetiology of students' absence from school.. For instance, Birman and Natriello (1978) grouped the root causes of absenteeism into three types – those that lie with the school, child and society. Galloway (1985), Adana (1987), Ioannakis (1997), and Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams and Dalicandro (1998) variously emphasized the importance of factors in the child/personal, family and school. Lansdown (1990), in this same vein, identified family-centred, child-centred and school-based factors as those that have implications for the truant behaviour of students.

It is, however, the submission of the Project Stay-In (1991), Rohrman (1993), and Kinder, Harland, Wilkin and Wakefield (1995) that the aetiology of truancy falls into four broad categories: child/personal, family, school, and society/community. In a slightly different manner, Osarenren (1996) discusses the main causes of truancy under factors resident in the home, school environment, peer group culture, and society. A cursory examination of these identified aetiological factors, however, reveal that government factor which explains the contribution of government at all levels to the occurrence of truant behaviour is conspicuously omitted. Besides, there is a surprising lack of empirical information on the predictive values of these underlying factors of truant behaviour. Consequently, there is the necessity to include government factor as one of the underlying factors as well as determined the separate and combine contributions of these predicting variables of truant behaviour. The principal focus of this study is to investigate the combined and separate contributions of child, family, school, society, and government to the occurrence truant behaviour among secondary school students in Oyo State. It is hoped that the findings of the study would sensitise government and stakeholders in the education sector on the gravity of truancy in our schools.

Research Questions

1. To what extent would child, family, school, society and government variables when taken together predict non-school attendance behaviour?
2. What is the relative contribution of each of the five variables to the prediction of non-school attendance behaviour?

Methodology

Research Design

The ex- post facto research design was adopted for the purpose of this study. This is as a result of the fact that the five independent variables under investigation have already occurred and

were, therefore, not manipulable. On the basis of this, the research interest was limited to the retrospective examination of these independent variables on the dependent variable with a view to establish causal-links between them.

Sample

The target population from which the sample of this study was drawn was secondary schools in Oyo State. Through a multi-stage random sampling technique 30 participating secondary schools from each of the three senatorial districts of the State were selected. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 180 chronic absentees from the sampled secondary schools in each of the three senatorial districts. These students have missed more than one third of the total expected attendance in the first two terms of 2001/2002 from the attendance register records.

A total number of 540 subjects participated in this study. Out of this number, 248 were males representing 45.93% while the remaining 292 representing 54.07% were females. Their ages ranged from twelve (12) years to twenty-one (21) years with a mean age of 15.99 years and standard deviation of 2.12 years.

Research Instruments

The four basic measuring instruments used for this study are:

(a) School Attendance Register

The school attendance register is one of the records being kept in the school. It is globally recognized as a source to be contacted if the attendance of students is to be determined both in the morning and afternoon. The school attendance register has been found to be highly reliable if not subjected to undue manipulation. (Ajayi, 1995). From the attendance registers of the selected schools for 2001/2002 session 750 students who have missed more than one third of the total expected attendance in the first two terms, were selected to participate in the study.

(b) Special Attendance Register

A number of scholars have asserted that school attendance register may not accurately reflect students' attendance in school. (Galloway, 1985; Stoll, 1993; Gabb, 1997). This assertion poses serious doubt on the reliability of whatever figures obtained from the school attendance register. In an attempt to establish the reliability of figures obtained from the school attendance register, some selected teachers were given a separate attendance register that would enable them monitor and record the attendance rate of the 750 persistent absentees. Out of the 750 students

monitored, a total of 678 students who have missed school for more than one third of the expected attendance during the four weeks of monitoring were selected to participate in the next stage of the study

(c) Non-School Attendance Behaviour Measuring Scale

An attempt to further justify figures obtained from the school attendance register and the special attendance register was the reason for the development of this scale. It has even been recommended that for a realistic idea of nature and extent of truant behaviour to be determined, it is imperative to ask those who indulged in the act (Stoll, 1993). On this premise the researcher developed a non-school attendance behaviour measuring scale. The scale has two sections. The first session sought personal information such as name, age, sex, religion, educational qualification of parents and the name of school. The second section requires the respondents to respond to ten non-school attendance behaviour related items. In an attempt to ascertain the reliability of the non-school attendance behaviour measuring scale the test-retest method was adopted. The result showed the Pearson "r" to be .85. With this result the scale was considered appropriate for the study.

(d) Predictors of Non-School Attendance Questionnaire

A purposely-developed structured questionnaire, which has two sub-divisions, was used to obtain data on the predictive ability of the five aetiological factors. The first sub-division required the respondents to supply a number of socio-demographic information such as name, sex, age, religion, class, educational qualification of parents, and the name of school. The second sub-division consists of fifteen positively worded items on each of the five aetiological predictors of non-school attendance. Each of the aetiological predictors of non-school attendance behaviour utilizes a five point Likert type rating scale with responses ranging from Very Much Like Me which is the highest score of five (5) to Very Much Unlike Me (1), which is the lowest score. For the purpose of this research, the higher the score the higher the predictive ability of the aetiological factors. The reliability index of the questionnaire was ascertained through the use of split-half test reliability coefficient. The questionnaire was administered on a total number of hundred chronic absentees (50 males and 50 females) selected from ten secondary schools. After scoring the split-half test reliability coefficient alpha was found to be 0.78.

Procedure

The collection of data on the rate at which the subjects of the study missed school took place in their respective secondary schools. The group administration of the Non-school attendance Behaviour Measuring scale and the Predictors of Non-School Attendance Behaviour Questionnaire followed this. The administration of these instruments took place in the respective schools of the participants on two separate occasions. The administration of these two instruments was preceded by brief explanation on the purpose and the importance of the test. The scale and the questionnaire were collected on the day of administration with the help of 30 research assistants specially trained for the purpose of this study.

Data Analysis

Data generated from the Predictor of Non -School Attendance Questionnaires were subjected to statistical analyses using multiple regression (stepwise) analysis for the two research questions at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of the data analysis obtained for the research questions are presented in Tables i & ii below:

TABLE I: SUMMARY OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE FIVE PREDICTOR VARIABLES AND TRUANT BEHAVIOUR

Regression Analysis

Multiple R	0.81219
Multiple R Square	0.65965
Standard Error	18.04559

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Due to Regression	5	337032.5	67406.61	206.994	.05
Due to Residual	539	510925.59			

* $P < .05$

Going by the results displayed in Table 1, it is evident that the combination of the five independent variables to the prediction of truant behaviour yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.81219, multiple regression squared (R^2) of 0.65965 (unadjusted) and standard error of 18.04559. In the same Table, the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F -ratio of 206.99 at the .05 level of significance. The multiple R^2 translates into 65.97%, which is the observed variance in truant behaviour. It may thus be said that about 66% of the total variability in student's truant behaviour is accounted for by a linear combination of the five aetiological variables.

TABLE II: THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FIVE AETIOLOGICAL VARIABLES TO THE PREDICTION OF TRUANT BEHAVIOUR

No of Variables	Variables Description	B	SE β	BETA	T	P
1	Child	0.748	0.099	0.248	7.494	.05
2	Family	0.411	0.087	0.137	4.730	.05
3	School	0.854	0.113	0.243	7.569	.05
4	Society	0.711	0.133	0.180	5.324	.05
5	Government	1.003	0.115	0.280	8.717	.05
	(Constant)	-47.233	5.624		-8.398	

The results in Table 11 indicate that the standardized regression weights (B) ranged from 0.411 to 1.003 while the unstandardized regression weights (Beta), on the other hand, ranged from 0.137 to 0.280. The standard error of estimate (SE β) according to the table ranged from 0.087 to 0.133 while the t-ratios ranged from 4.730 to 8.717. Since the t-ratio associated with each of the five aetiological variables is significant at .05 level the conclusion, therefore, is that each of the variables significantly contributed to the prediction of non-school attendance behaviour.

Discussion

The results of the statistical analysis of the first research question revealed that the combination of the five variables jointly accounted for 66 percent of the total variance in non-school attendance behavior. The observed F-ratio value of 206.99, which was significant at .05 level, lends credence to the fact that their predictive effectiveness did not occur by chance. Similarly, the magnitude of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is also reflected in the values of the multiple regression of 0.812 and multiple R^2 of 0.660. This shows that there is a linear relationship between the five-predictor variables and the independent variable. This corroborates Stoll (1993), Eric Clearinghouse on Educational Measurement (1997), and Dekalb (1999) submissions that the factors responsible for truant behaviour are many and that a single factor cannot be the sole principal cause.

It is, however, significant to note that this is the first study, to the best of the investigator knowledge, in the area of students' truant behaviour to examine the predictive value of the combination of these five aetiological factors. Explanations of non-school attendance behaviour, therefore, go beyond the three or four factors classification identified in the literature.

The findings on the second research question that sought to know the relative contribution of each of the five variables to the prediction of truant behaviour indicates that each of the five aetiological variables significantly predicted truant behaviour. However, the extent to which each of the variables contributed to the prediction of truant behaviour differs because the value of standardized regression weights associated with these variables indicates that government factor was the most potent contributor to the prediction with t-ratio of 8.717 followed by school factor with t-ratio of 7.569; child factor with t-ratio of 7.494; society factor with t-ratio of 5.324 and family factor with t-ratio of 4.730. Despite the fact that family factor was significantly correlated with truant behaviour, it remains the least predictor of truant behaviour out of the five independent factors.

The independent contribution of child, family, school, and society factors to the prediction of truant behaviour did not come as a surprise. This is because the results agree with that of Galloway (1985), Gabb (1997), and Oerlemans & Jenkins (1998) who regards truant behaviour as symptoms of disturbance in the child. Docking (1990), and Garry (1996) related non-school attendance behaviour to inadequacies in the family.; Gabb (1997; Rothman (2001) attributed school absenteeism to symptoms of institutional based problems; and Rohrman (1993) and Osarenren (1996) who traced the aetiology of absenteeism to the society.

The surprising revelation of these findings, however, lies with government factor, which not only made significant contributions to the prediction of truant behaviour but also appears to be the most potent contributor. It is surprising because this is the first time that the variable will be included directly in the study of aetiology of truancy. The relative contribution of government factor may be attributed to the fact that majority of the schools used in this study are government owned. Besides this, people at times tend to lay the blame of inadequacies noticed in themselves, family, school and community on government's failure to act. This is usually the case when government is saddled with the responsibilities of providing everything needed by the citizens. Hence, the tendency is high for persistent absentees to relate truant

behaviour problems to government inability to perform its responsibilities in and out of school.

The finding attributed government factor as the best predictor of non-school attendance behaviour, however, contradict that of Gullat and Lemoine (1997) who maintains that the student's attitude toward school is the most important factor. Similarly, the finding study also negates Reid's (1982) earlier report that the school is the cause of persistent absenteeism. The finding of this study, to the contrary, shows that students' attitude towards the school (child factor), though important it is not as important as government and school factors.

Implications

The implications of the findings for counselling practice in school is that the five aetiological variables should be the primary targets in an attempts to prevent or in the design of intervention programmes for non-school attendance behaviour. School counsellors should organize fora where agents of these factors would x-ray their contributions with a view to improving absentees' attendance in schools.

Similarly, school counsellors need to identify other factors responsible for truancy behaviour this study could not explain. Government factor, which is the most potent contributor, should be given considerable attention in mounting preventive or corrective programmes for students' truant behaviour.

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